

independent claims 1, 10, and 33 have been rejected as anticipated by the assignee's of this application own U.S. Patent No. 6,024,584 (Lemke et al.). Independent claim 34 has been rejected as obvious over Lemke et al. Applicants respectfully disagree with these rejections and respectfully submit that independent claims 1, 10, 33, and 34 are patentable over Lemke et al.

Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claims 1 and 33 are patentable over Lemke et al. for two separate reasons: (1) each recite that the plug base and the receptacle base are "substantially identical" and (2) each recite a receptacle cover that is coupled to a receptacle base. Lemke et al. teach neither limitation. Because the plug and receptacle bases are substantially identical, the manufacturing of the inventive connector is simplified and manufacturing costs are minimized (e.g., specification at 2:1-8; 5:17-25; 6:16-7:1; 12:26-13:1). Having interchangeable parts reduces manufacturing costs because only one set of manufacturing equipment, specifications, etc.. is needed for the connector bases.

Lemke et al. fail to teach receptacle and plug bases that are substantially identical as recited in independent Claims 1 and 33. The office action relies on Lemke et al.'s embodiments that are shown in Figures 24, 24a, and 25. According to the office action, Lemke et al.'s Figures 24, 24a, and 25 depict a plug base 432 and a receptacle base 326 that are substantially identical (office action at 3:2-3). Applicants respectfully submit that this is incorrect. As shown in Figure 24, Lemke et al.'s plug base 432 has a straight medial slot through which the contacts 486 extend, while the receptacle base 326 has a medial slot that has a straight and a divergent medial slot for the receptacle contacts (see labeled medial slots in attached Lemke et al. Fig. 24). Thus, Lemke et al.'s plug and receptacle bases are not substantially identical and are not interchangeable; this results in higher manufacturing costs, which is one problem that the claimed invention tries to solve. As Lemke et al. fail to teach Claims 1's and 33's substantially

identical claim limitation, Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claims 1 and 33 and their dependent claims are not anticipated by Lemke et al. and are in condition for allowance.

Not only do Lemke et al.'s Figures 24, 24a, and 25 fail to disclose the common receptacle and plug base, they also fail to disclose a receptacle cover that is coupled to a receptacle base, as claimed in independent Claims 1 and 33. The cross-hatching of items 326 and 330 in Figure 25 shows a single piece receptacle, not two pieces. Further, Lemke et al. refer to item 326 as the receptacle "base wall" and item 330 as the receptacle "interior side" (Lemke et al. at 8:7-9). Thus, the statement in the office action that "a receptacle cover (330) . . . is coupled to the second common base 326" (office action 3:7-8) is simply incorrect. There is only one piece. Because Lemke et al. fail to teach the receptacle cover limitation of Claims 1 and 33, Applicants respectfully submit that for this additional reason independent Claims 1 and 33 and their dependent claims are not anticipated by Lemke et al. and are in condition for allowance.

Independent Claim 10 recites coupling a receptacle cover to the second common base. As described above, Lemke et al.'s Figures 24, 24a and 25 simply fail to teach coupling a receptacle cover to a receptacle base. Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claim 10 and its dependent claims are not anticipated by Lemke et al. and are in condition for allowance.

Applicants also respectfully submit that independent Claim 31 is not obvious over Lemke et al. because Lemke et al. fail to teach the claimed plurality of diamond shaped pockets. Although the office action acknowledges that Lemke et al. fail to teach this claim limitation (office action at p. 7, 4), Claim 31 was considered obvious because according to the office action "applicants have presented no explanation that these particular configurations of the pockets are

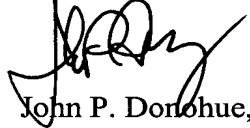
significant or are anything more than one of numerous configurations a person of ordinary skill in the art would find obvious" (office action at p.8, 4). This statement is incorrect.

Applicants explained the benefits of the diamond shaped pockets throughout the specification (e.g., specification at 2:9-15; 7:23-8:6). As explained in the specification, the diamond shaped pockets are significant because they provide additional contact clearance. As stated in the specification, because of the diamond shaped configuration "[t]here will always be clearance around the entire periphery of the end of the contact extending through the recess even if the contact is not centered with in the recess 22." Thus, contrary to the statement in the office action, Applicants have explained the invention behind significance of the diamond shaped pockets, and they are not a design choice. As Lemke et al. fail to teach the claimed inventive diamond shaped pockets and they are not a design choice, Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claim 31 and its dependent claim, Claim 32, are not obvious and are in condition for allowance.

Applicants believe that the forgoing comprises a full and complete response to the office action of record. If the Examiner has any questions, he is invited to contact the undersigned.

Applicants believe that the foregoing amendment places the application in condition for allowance, and respectfully request a notice of allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



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